

Station Agent Writes Story On Early History of Riley

By DOROTHY CLARK

Six years ago Mr. George G. Jackson wrote his version of the history of Riley, Ind., and had it printed in booklet form of four pages. An autographed copy of this booklet was recently given to the Historical Museum's library collection.

Jackson was employed by the New York Central Railroad as station agent in Riley for 37 years from 1908 to 1945. In this capacity he had the privilege of talking with many of the people who were born in and around Riley during the 1830's and 1840's.



DOROTHY J. CLARK

In the 1820's there was a village just south of the present town. It was platted and named Hazelgreen with between 10 and 12 homes. When the Wabash & Erie Canal was completed in 1852, the village of Lockport, platted in the Canal, sprang up and Hazelgreen disappeared. The canal was in operation 12 to 14 years before it was abandoned.

The canal was located at the east side of Lockport and the name was a result of the locks which were near the village and used to raise or lower the boats over the high ground southeast of the village.

After the canal went down, the name of Lockport soon disappeared, and the name of Riley took over. It seems there was another town named Lockport, Ind., and the Post Office had to have another name, so the villagers chose Riley, Ind.

Village Grew

The village in the 1850s and 60s gradually grew with a store and a grist mill. It was a very busy village with the shipping of grain and livestock. The canal boats, usually 8x30 feet, and were pulled by one or two mules or horses walking or trotting along a towpath.

There were several hundred men working near Riley for four or five years, mostly Irishmen who came here to help build the state's canal system. They were paid 80 cents per day—40 cents in cash and the balance in script.

These scripts were issued by the State of Indiana, assisting the Canal Company. When the state went bankrupt, all outstanding script was worthless.

In earlier days there were six or seven locks which raised and lowered the boats about five feet. One of the

old stone locks is left in its old bed, three-fourths mile north of Riley.

Riley people at Terre Haute sometimes chartered a boat and come to Riley for an out-dance. The old fishery and the ing or picnic or country old blue hole are evidence of the canal route and the deep canal bed.

In the 1850s and 60s a tanning yard was located on the grounds just west of the present Methodist Church. The hides were placed in brick pits, six or seven feet deep. The hides were covered with white oak bark, a layer of hides and then a layer of brick.

Hides Tanned

The acid from the bark treated the hides so they could be scraped and tanned by hand. Later this method of tanning leather gave way to chemical treatments.

The geographical location of

Riley helped considerably in the welfare of the town. First, it is 569 feet above sea level. The government's geographical survey plate placed on the southeast corner of the Odd Fellows building shows this.

We are told by the old folks that in the 1890s there were five saloons in the village, two in the east end of town, one in the middle and two in the west end.

For so small a town, there were many fraternal orders. Some remarked that Riley was "lodge poor," and the following will bear this out, that Riley had more lodges than it could support properly.

The oldest was the Masonic order organized May 25, 1869 and its auxiliary, the Eastern Star organized December 25, 1875. The Odd Fellows was organized in November, 1875 and the Rebeccas

was organized November, 1885.

The Knights of Pythian were organized June 22, 1887. The Improved Order of Red Men and their auxiliary the Pocahontas Order were organized about 1900. The Modern Woodmen of America was organized January, 1911. Their auxiliary the Royal Neighbors of America was organized in May, 1916.

Clubs Popular

These Orders contained a membership of from 50 to 150. The fraternal orders were quite popular in the eighties, nineties and well up into the 1920s.

Riley has been greatly benefited by the oil fields and coal mines. The Clay Oil field, located two miles east, was the first well brought in in 1905. There were seven wells later that produced a lot of oil for the next 10 or 15 years.

This field caused a lot of excitement in the surrounding country and hundreds of tank cars were shipped from Riley station. Another oil field two miles south of the village was developed with 12 to 15 wells producing oil. This field began about 1951 and is still going strong to this date.

The miners were of great importance. The Riley Mine, one-half mile west on State Road 46, began producing in 1916 and lasted about 10 years, working about 25 men, producing around five railroad cars per day.

The McClelland Mine two

miles north on the railroad began producing in 1918 and quit about 1930. This deep mine produced around 20 railroad cars of coal per day and employed 60 men. The first strip mine east and south of town in 1923 and ceased in 1931.

This mine, Hickory Grove,

also produced about 20 cars of coal per day, employing around 25 men. The Maumee Mine three miles south started about 1935. It is now the Peabody Coal Co.

Founders Remembered

The founders of a town or community are seldom remembered further than the second generation. The black-

smiths have been: George Baker, Lewis Sheets, Whitacre and Hampton. Whitacre worked as a blacksmith from the age of 15 until he was 88 years of age.

There have been four hotels in Riley in earlier years. Everett Graham had a barber shop here for 50 years. Other barbers were: Hotsy Holly,

Cecil Biggs, Bill Graham and Bill Hudson.

The grain elevator has been operated by men named Brill, Farrell, Coons, McCullough, Miller Reece, Tom Jackson and the present operator John Beddow.

In 1890 John Fox established the undertaking business,

which his son William C. Fox took over in 1922 after his father's death. Sixty-three years ago Wm. C. Fox started an ice cream parlor which is still in operation in the oldest building in Riley, the Manning Corner, bought originally for \$400 for 1½ lots and the building. At one time Mr. Fox

also ran the Post Office.

Last October Mr. Fox celebrated his 90th birthday, and at this writing is the oldest active funeral director in the State of Indiana today. He is one of Riley's staunchest boosters, needless to say.

Community focus



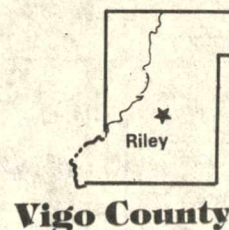
Signed up: Julie Jacob poses at the back wall of Riley's J & F store, which is sided by metal ad signs.

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Riley (In)

THE
LIFE
OF

RILEY



Vigo County

Written by Dave Delaney Photographs by Bob Poynter, Bonnie Jeffery



Riley banner: This antique banner hangs in corner of ice cream store.

Lakewood dwellers offer new look to old town

RILEY — There are only 250 people who can officially call Riley home. But if you're not concerned about what's official and what's not, you could swell Riley's population to more than 700.

The life of Riley would not really be properly painted without including Lakewood subdivision and its 110 homes. The area nestles right up against the town and is built around a 30-acre lake.

The Lakewood homes range in price from \$50,000 to \$125,000. Most people living there are closely tied to Terre Haute by their jobs.

Subdivision developer Norm Froderman said the land was once owned by J. Roberts Dailey, Speaker of the House of Representatives in the Indiana General Assembly.

Riley is located on busy Indiana 46, which gives the tiny town of sense of constant bustle. A few of the businesses here are local institutions: Fox's Ice Cream Parlor, J and F Market and the Riley Grill.

Joe Fox is chief scooper at the ice cream parlor, maintaining a family tradition started up by his father in 1902. Fox said the store is the 16th oldest business in the state operated continuously by the same family.

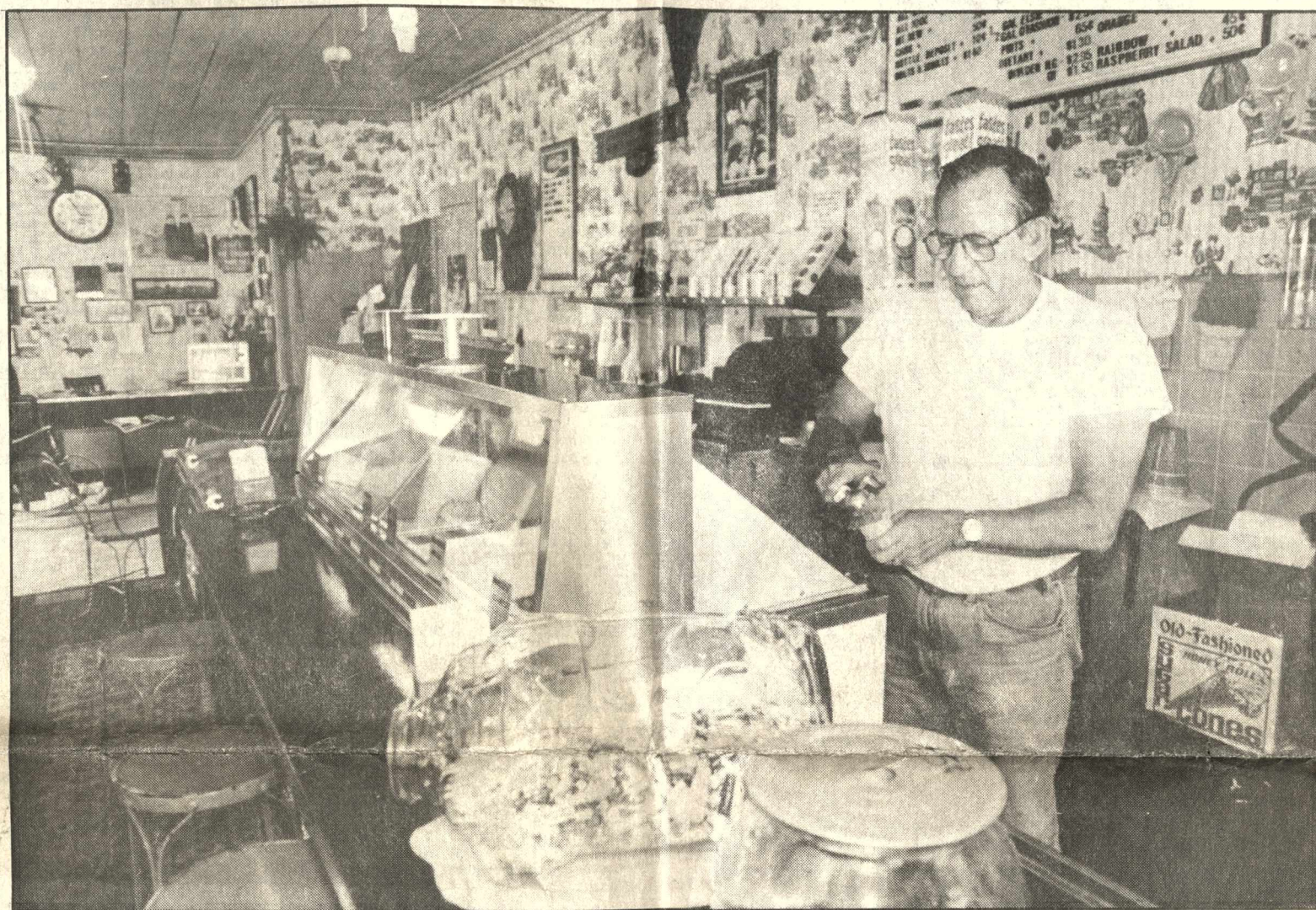
The parlor suggests another era with its curved-iron ice cream tables and chairs, old-fashioned wood and glass candy counters and ancient rocking chairs.

Fox said many customers who stop in for a cone end up making a bid for some of the furniture, including an elderly wooden cabinet in which various glass pieces are stored.

"We get a lot of three-generation families coming in for ice cream," Fox said.

The walls of the ice cream emporium are filled with pictures from many decades. Somebody cut out the front of a Kellogg's Corn Flakes box showing actor Hunter VonLeer eating a bowl of cereal.

"I suppose Hunter is our most famous citizen," Fox said. Hunter's mother, Jessie Jo, still lives here. His sister, also named



Chief scooper: Joe Fox fills a cone for a customer at his ice cream parlor, which has been in the family since 1902.

Jessie Jo, teaches at North Vigo High School.

Three women have been operating the J & F Market at the corner of Washington and First streets for the past 33 years. There are four other workers there, all women.

"Our ground beef is our big drawing card," said Evelyn Jeffers, who runs the store with her sister Eula and relative Mary Fagg. "We also make homemade salads and barbecue sauce."

Fagg said they have a lot of steady, friendly customers who

have been trading doing their grocery business for years in the crowded aisles of the high-ceilinged, two-story building. "This little town is like a big family," Fagg said.

Eula Jeffers is the head cook of the crew. "Two mornings a week I get up at 3:30 to make the salads," explained Jeffers. The store is well stocked with goods, some of which spill over into the aisles.

Melvin and Loretta Jones run the Riley Grill on Indiana 46. "They say there's been a

restaurant on this corner for a hundred years," Jones said.

Jones said biscuits and gravy are a popular breakfast item along with made-to-order omelets. The Joneses serve a plate lunch during the noon hour and praised the work of their cook, Cindy Green. "She makes everything from scratch," Jones said. "We serve what you would go to grandma's to eat."

They said they pattern their meals after what former owners Lloyd and Jane York served.

The Joneses share their build-

ing with Kim Jackson, Riley's only attorney. "Everyone seems to appreciate her," Jones said.

Just down the highway from the grill, Henry and Edith Wood sat on the front porch of their white-sided house and watched the traffic roll by.

"This town is the same size it was when I first came here in 1912," said the retired coal miner.

"We both like it here," Wood said he can recall when there was only one electric street light in town and that all roads were gravel.

"I can also remember going to

the ice cream parlor here as a kid," Wood said.

The many streets of Lakewood subdivision are lined with attractive homes and well-maintained lawns. Retired Terre Haute Judge Edward S. Everett and his wife have lived here 16 years.

"This is the friendliest place in all Vigo County," said Everett, 79. "We've made many personal friends with neighbors here." He said he and his wife have never regretted moving here from Terre Haute.

The retired judge is one of several subdivision residents who keeps a fishing boat parked by his dock. Fishing is said to be good this summer, with one resident having landed a almost unbelievable 8-pound, 4-ounce bass.

Conrad Fox, a retired school teacher, lives right next door to the retired judge. "There's a lot of closeness in this town," said Fox, a 1931 graduate of the former Riley High School.

Riley has a school, but these days it only goes to the sixth grade. Still, it is a rare small town that has its own school anymore. "People here are quite proud of having their own school," Fox said.

People interested in history are also proud of Riley's link with the famed Wabash and Erie canal, which wound its way through this village. "You can still see the timbers in the canal lock," said Froderman, who said he sold 10-acres containing the lock to the Vigo County Historical Society. "You can still see the foot path and foundation of the little house by the canal."

In more recent times, Melanie Nairn opened her Flower Basket business a few years ago and said business is good.

"I learned how to do this on my own," said Nairn who makes up arrangements and wreaths using silk flowers. Nairn also operates a catering business and is a backup mail carrier.

Jim Fox, the ice cream man, is a big Riley booster. "Like my brother always said, if you don't live in Riley you're just camping out."



Afternoon activities: Conrad Fox (above) checks his garden near the lake in Lakewood subdivision. In the town of Riley, Tyler Fagan and Jason Marshall wait their turn as Troy Fagan works his magic on a video game at the ice cream parlor.



Porch people: Edith and Henry Wood relax on the front porch of their home, which faces busy Indiana 46 in Riley.